

New Hampshire Special Education

Onsite Evaluation Report

Final Copy

School Administrative Unit # 31

Superintendent: Denis R. Joy

Evaluation conducted on January 9-10, 1996

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New Hampshire Special Education

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I. Introduction:

II. Status of Corrective Actions from previous onsite:

III. Issues of Significance:

IV: Citations to the New Hampshire State Standards for Special Education:
(Commendations, Citations, and Suggestions per school)

Note: It should be noted that suggestions are not considered corrective actions and therefore are given as technical assistance. The district is not mandated to implement them.

SAU # 31

I. INTRODUCTION:

A New Hampshire Special Education On-Site Evaluation was conducted at SAU #31 comprised of the following schools: Newmarket Elementary, the preschool special needs program and Newmarket Junior/Senior High School. The on-site team met on January 9-10, 1996 in order to review the status of Special Education services being provided to eligible students.

Activities related to this evaluation included the close review of all the teaching certifications of Special Education staff, analyzing of SPEDIS data, and random inspection of student records. Interviews were held with the Superintendent, Special Education Director, building principals, regular and special education teachers and related service personnel, as time and availability permitted. In addition, parents were interviewed via telephone. Throughout the visit the team had full cooperation from the school personnel and this helpfulness was greatly appreciated.

The report which you are about to read represents the consensus of all the members of your on-site team. Please keep in mind that this is a "report for exception", meaning that only exceptions to the N.H. State Standards have been addressed. If a component is not mentioned, that does not mean that the team did not review it; it just means that there were no exceptions to the Standards found in that particular area.

II. STATUS OF PREVIOUS ON-SITE: (February 1992)

The visiting team was favorably impressed with the effort that has been put forth to address the citations listed in the on-site report of 1992. It was the consensus of the team that some progress has been made in resolving issues of noncompliance and that the staff in each building are working hard to improve and refine special education practices.

Specifically, the on-site team determined that there is improved compliance documentation in student records and that the special education process from referral to evaluation to identification has shown improvement. All of the special education staff currently employed in the SAU have appropriate credentials, although the team did note that there are no individuals who hold the categorical endorsement of EH. The team further noted that there is now a school psychologist on staff and strong efforts have been made to establish appropriate evaluation timelines as outlined in the state standards, and building administrators are taking a more active role in the supervision of special education programming within their school. Still in process of being addressed is the need for improved record keeping and organization of student files and ensuring that all aspects of the special education process is fully documented. For FY'97, the SAU hopes to add a part time building coordinator position (pending budget approval) to assist in monitoring and supervision of the special education process, this should be helpful in the oversight of paperwork compliance and resolving inconsistencies in the special education process.

Overall, it can be said that SAU #31 continues to make progress in resolving areas of noncompliance noted in the previous on-site report. The visiting team would like to commend the staff for their efforts and perseverance in meeting compliance regulations and for the programming they make available for all children.

III. ISSUES OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The visiting team would like to recognize the entire staff and administration in SAU #31 for the services they provide to all children. The staff within the SAU are competent and professional and there is evidence that the SAU is making a strong attempt to provide programming for disabled students with non-disabled peers.

III. ISSUES OF SIGNIFICANCE: (con't)

As the visiting team carried out its responsibility, a few issues of significance are listed as follows:

There continues to be no systematic method of organizing student records to ensure that all essential information pertaining to the child is readily assessable and easily located. The on-site team found that materials in student records were difficult to identify, somewhat disorganized and sometimes missing. Adopting the new statewide "model" forms and case manager checklist will assist in addressing some of the oversights in paperwork compliance.

To her credit, the Special Education Director is trying to oversee special education compliance in each building. This, however, is an impossible task, and with little secretarial support, lack of a computer, and little assistance in organizing and tracking paperwork, it is even more cumbersome. Currently the Special Education Director is responsible for much of her own typing, filing, copying, correspondence etc. and the team felt that her time should be dedicated to utilization of professional skills and support and consultation to staff rather than clerical tasks. Perhaps additional secretarial time for the director and more responsibility for monitoring special education at the building level would resolve some of these issues.

Another issue raised by the team was the fact that at the time of the visit, SAU #31 had no EH endorsed teacher. In order to be in compliance, when evaluation/placement teams meet, they must have a teacher certified in the area of the suspected disability present. Because there is no teacher who has an EH categorical endorsement, evaluation/placement teams do not always have appropriate membership.

In visiting each of the schools it was evident to the team that facilities are crowded and that there is not adequate instructional space for special education programming including space to provide related services, testing, parent conferences, team meetings and confidential phone calls with parents.

It was also the consensus of the visiting team that there is a significant need for improved professional growth opportunities within the SAU. Staff need support in how to best supervise and utilize teacher assistants, teacher aides need training, and all staff and administrators would benefit from training in best instructional practices, the inclusionary philosophy, modifying and adapting curriculum, IEP writing and transition planning, and the special education process, policy and procedure.

The last issue of concern that surfaced centered around the many "housekeeping" kinds of errors and oversights in documenting the special education process at the building level. While there is evidence that progress is being made, more attention needs to be paid to adherence to procedure and ensuring that timelines are met, documents filled out completely, and that IEP's are comprehensive and meet the requirements as outlined in the state standards.

Overall, the visiting team would like to commend the staff in the SAU for efforts being put forth to resolve the above mentioned issues. There are many praiseworthy things happening in both regular and special education and the visiting team would like to reinforce the philosophy and goals that the SAU is working toward.

IV. COMMENDATIONS, CITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS:

The leadership of the special education director is an asset to the SAU. She is well recognized and supported by staff and parents.

Throughout the SAU there is a sense of cooperation and teamwork among all staff.

The building administrators are taking a more active role in the supervision of special education programming at the building level.

Parents interviewed via phone felt supported and pleased with programming being offered to their children. They reported that they are actively involved in the special education decision making and there is a feeling of trust and faith in the teachers and administrators.

There is a genuine commitment on the part of all staff to meet the needs of all children. Staff and administrators throughout the SAU were consistently described as dedicated and child centered.

SAU #31 - SAU-WIDE

PROGRAM(S): ALL

CITATIONS:

<u>ED # 1129.01(b1-11)</u>	Local Education Agency Plan SAU #31 needs to revise and update the LEA application and plan to fully describe the district's policies and procedures regarding the provision of a free appropriate public education to all students with educational disabilities as outlined in the state standards.
<u>ED #1119.07(a)</u>	Qualifications of Service Providers At the time of the onsite visitation, there were no staff in the SAU who hold the categorical endorsement of EH.
<u>ED # 1107.02(a-6)</u>	Process As reflected in the report that follows, in each of the schools the team identified numerous oversights and omissions in the special education process
<u>ED # 1129.05(c)</u>	SPEDIS Forms and Data Entry ASP forms are not filed with the NHDOE within 20 calendar days after parental signature
<u>ED # 1119.06(d)</u>	Facilities and Location Upon visiting each of the schools the team determined that the physical space used for related services and other instructional programs for students with educational disabilities was not always sufficient in size to accommodate equipment, maintain confidentiality implement the students' IEP's and provide appropriate learning activities.

SUGGESTIONS:

- As in the past, the team strongly recommends that there be improved supervision of the special education process at the building level. Supervision of case management continues to be a problem area as there are still many oversights in policy and procedure and paperwork compliance.
- More clerical assistance is needed for the special education director, especially in the monitoring and entry of SPEDIS data in a timely manner. In addition, a computer is needed for the special education director to assist in record keeping, communication and daily activities.
- The team strongly suggests that an all inclusive manual be developed that clearly outlines and defines the special education process from referral to identification, this manual should include all the standardized forms.
- The team strongly recommends that there be improved organization of student records to ensure that all necessary information is readily assessable and easily located. A systematic approach that would be utilized in all schools by all staff is suggested.
- The SAU needs to encourage staff to obtain categorical endorsement in the area of EH or contract for consultation and supervision with an individual who holds this categorical endorsement.
- If confidential student records are going to be located in the special education classrooms, the files need to be secured in a locked fireproof cabinet.
- On-going inservice training is recommended in such areas as inclusionary practices, modifying and adapting curricula, team teaching, best practices, hands-on multisensory approaches to teaching and learning, special education policy and procedure and the writing of IEP's and transition plans.

SCHOOL:

Newmarket Preschool

PROGRAM(S):

SPEDIS # OF FILES: (1) 552754 (2) 550279 (3) 550278 (4) 550274

COMMENDATIONS:

- Staff are committed and dedicated as well as knowledgeable about student needs.
- Good communication skills between all staff is evident.
- Organized/well kept records are to be commended.
- IEP's are comprehensive and well written.

CITATIONS:

<u>ED # 1107.02(b)</u>	3 files: Did not have evidence of written notice of referral to parents.
<u>ED # 1107.02(d)</u>	1 file: Did not have written consent to evaluate.
<u>ED # 1107.07(b)</u>	3 files: It was unclear as to who the LEA representative was at the meeting.
<u>ED # 1111.01</u>	3 files: There was no documentation to support discussion of extended school year.
<u>ED # 1115.04(b)</u>	4 files: Had no documentation to support discussion of Least Restrictive Environment.

SUGGESTIONS:

- The SAU needs to follow through with plans to relocate the preschool special needs program to a more appropriate setting (i.e. the elementary school).
- The SAU needs to explore more options to provide programming for special needs preschoolers with typical peers on a daily basis. (i.e. revise mainstreaming or opening the program to non-disabled students at a tuition rate.)

SCHOOL: Newmarket Elementary

PROGRAM(S): All

SPEDES # OF FILES: (1) 536106 (2) 536158 (3) 536083 (4) 516419

COMMENDATIONS:

- Staff at the elementary school demonstrate a spirit of enthusiasm and dedication to all children.
- The Inclusionary Classroom Model is highly effective.
- All staff are open to professional growth opportunities.
- Despite crowded conditions staff does an outstanding job of providing services and implementing IEP's.

CITATIONS:

ED # 1107.02(b)(d) 4 files: Had no evidence of written notification to parents.
ED # 1103.02(f)

ED # 1107.03(a) 1 file: Did not have multi-disciplinary team.

ED # 1107.05(a)(b) 1 file: Did not have qualified examiner.
3 files: Evaluation timelines were not met and no extension had been signed.

ED # 1107.07(b) 4 files: The SEE/PT team did not have appropriate composition.

ED # 1107.08(c)(d) 1 file: Had no classroom observation and written report did not have all required components.

ED # 1109.03(b) 3 files: Did not have evidence that IEP team had appropriate composition.

ED # 1115.03(a) 4 files: Lacked evidence that LEA representative was present.

ED # 1115.04(b) 3 files: Had no documentation that Least Restrictive Environment had been determined annually.

SUGGESTIONS: None

SCHOOL: Newmarket High School

PROGRAM(S): All

SPEDES # OF FILES: (1) 522271 (2) 530265 (3) 536108 (4) 289298 (5) 080473

COMMENDATIONS:

- Use of the new forms has helped to rectify oversights in the special education process.
- The staff are enthusiastic and willing to meet the needs of all children.
- The atmosphere within the school is pleasant, inviting and welcoming.
- Staff try very hard to provide programming in the least restrictive environment.
- All of the staff interviewed were competent and dedicated individuals.

CITATIONS:

<u>ED # 1125.01</u>	2 files: Had no evidence of permission to test. One requested permission for cognitive only but administered a battery of many other tests.
<u>ED # 1107.06(b1-3)</u>	There were no evaluation written summaries found in the files that meet criteria.
<u>ED # 1107.05(a-d)</u>	In all files it could not be determined if examiner was appropriate.
<u>ED # 1125(b)</u>	W.P.N. forms exist but are not filled in correctly or completely.
<u>ED # 1109.01(a)</u>	Present levels of performance are not clearly indicated on IEP. Yearly performance levels in math, reading and writing can be established and recorded to build IEP's as well as to monitor progress.
<u>ED # 1109.01(l)</u>	Transition component not developed.
<u>ED # 1109.04(a)</u>	4 files: There was no evidence that notices to parents were not sent 10 days prior to meetings date.
<u>ED # 1109.11(a,b)</u>	All files had no evidence of monitoring IEP goals and objectives (November, 1995 was the last report/monitoring date).

SUGGESTIONS: None

SUMMARY - CONSUMER/CONSTITUENT SURVEY

Overall the staff in SAU #31 feel that there is adequate support to assist in implementing programs and providing services for all students. It was reported that for the most part there are enough supplies and materials to augment textbooks and paper & pencil tasks are needed.

In reviewing comments regarding school programs, staff consistently indicated that there is a need to review curriculum offered to special needs students to determine if appropriate/adequate modifications are being made. It appears that there is no regular cycle for review of curricula (regular & special ed.) or review of teaching materials, assessment or instructional activities to determine their effectiveness and appropriateness.

Communication between regular and special educators varies throughout the SAU, especially at the high school level. All staff share positive standards for learning, yet there is sometimes a lack of communication between regular and special educators as well differing philosophies which can impede the students ability to succeed.

In terms of parental participation, it is clear that staff actively seek parental involvement, yet this participation depends upon the availability and time constraints of the family. Parents shared a positive attitude of the schools, programs and staff, and report a trust and faith in teachers.

In summary the surveys completed by staff throughout the SAU reflect a group who is working hard to meet the individual and developmental needs of children, however, their efforts sometimes fall short due to some inconsistencies in programming and curriculum. The realities, as compared to the vision that the staff embraces and shares are often at odds and certainly limited by physical and space constraints.